

THE STRATEGIC ADVENTURES GUIDE TO PHOTO SHOOTS

By Paul Cummings

It's going to happen. You will find yourselves in a position where you need new, exciting images for your marketing materials. You'll want these images to illustrate who you are, the work you do, and the emotions and/or products that are created through your business, organization, or program. Designing or re-designing websites, brochures, and other promotional materials is the most common need for pictures, but there are many other uses that you'll discover as you develop a strong library of images.

As a consultant who has spent a lot of time photographing indoor and outdoor challenge courses, I'd like to pass along a few pointers that will help you in planning and hosting a successful photo shoot. This list will help you form a concise plan that will provide you with your desired results.

Steps to Take:

- **Determine the Pictures you want:** Considered a "shot list", this will be a very specific list of images you want. Work with the designer of your promo materials for suggestions on what will have the most impact and convey the message you want to share. Flip through other catalogs and brochures to help you determine what kinds of pictures you like and to which pictures you most strongly respond. Showing the photographer examples of pictures you like will help them in their planning as well.
- **Find a photographer:** Word of mouth and referrals are the best way. If you are "cold calling" a few in your area, be sure to ask to see their portfolio and get a cost estimate prior to making any agreements. This is a relationship that will require good communication, so be sure that you're comfortable with their personality and working style. Photographers vary in their releasing of rights to images, so be very specific with regards to ownership of the images in your agreement with them.
- **Location:** If possible, visit the site with the photographer.
- **Pick the Dates:** Determine how much time is needed for this project. If it's an indoor site, weather won't be an issue. But if you are doing any outdoor work, allow for a "rain date". This will save you from having to re-book the photographer and retrace all of the steps you'll read below. The easiest thing to do is add a day to the shoot dates that can be used as a buffer.

- **Schedule the Time:** Again, working with the photographer will be helpful on this. Morning light and late afternoon light are the nicest to shoot and a long day will allow breaks when needed without everyone feeling rushed to finish in a short amount of time. Consider 7am – 6pm. This allows for people showing up late, etc., without compromising your time.
- **Determine your Market:** If you want corporate clients, be sure that they are accurately represented in your images. AT&T may not come to you for a high energy teambuilding program if all your materials have high school kids in cutoff shorts in them. Appeal visually to your ideal clients.
- **Number and Age Range of Models needed:** Once you've determined your target audience, you can get the right demographic group in your shots (ex. gray hair, kids, women, different heights, and weights). If you have a site or structure to be photographed, you want to have enough models at the site so that each element in the pictures can be occupied (including belayers and team members offering encouragement, celebrating success, etc.) The more, the better!
- **Finding Models:** They can be employees of yours, friends, people in the community, students at the local college, etc. Note: Some people who volunteer may also view this day as an opportunity to get their kids or family out on the course for a fun day. If your target audience is kids, this is great. If not, be very clear in your explanation of the day that it will be a professional shoot focusing on the work. As a way of saying thank you to volunteers, you may want to offer an afternoon on the course for them and their families, but if they don't understand what you need the day of the shoot, there can be disappointment and some very bored, very distracting folks running around.
- **Send Info Packet to Models:** Include a map to the location, a photo release form, a release of liability, phone number to call if they will be late or unable to attend, and clothing recommendations (see below). Also be sure to clarify dates and times of the shoot.
- **Brief the Models:** Let them know they will be asked to climb, hang out, stop, hold a pose, redo a move, switch models as the photographer sees fit, and take clear direction from you and the photographer. It is always a blast for the models, and they typically want to do a little more than you'll have time for. The clearer you are with this, the more successful your day will be and the more effective the photographer can be.

- **Have your staff on hand to free up the photographer:** Your staff knows what an actual program looks like, so they can be sure to position “team members” below the climber, clapping and encouraging them as they climb, etc. Your staff is crucial in the management of the people on the ground and the realistic set-up of the photographed initiative or element. If photographing ground or low elements, have a staff member actually facilitate it to get real facial expressions and reactions.
- **Clothing Requirements/Suggestions:** Important! Models should arrive with a pair of shorts and a pair of long pants, clean, not wrinkled. No jeans. Shirts: Clean, unwrinkled, logo-free, no holes or tears. If it’s a professional target audience, have collared or polo shirts. Have models bring 3-4 different tops so they can change if they sweat or get dirty. Bright colors make ALL the difference in a shot, Reds, blues, greens, yellows. Try to stay away from plain white. No jewelry other than a watch (small earrings for women are o.k.); hats should be avoided (they cast shadows and create the dreaded “hat head”). Ask models to bring a comb or brush with them.
- **Agenda:** Have a plan, but keep it flexible.
- **You need to Provide:** Snacks (fruit, granola bars, candy bars), plenty of water, and lunch if appropriate.
- **Additional Shots:** You may want to schedule time with the photographer to take a group shot of you and your employees and/or individual head shots of them.
- **Additional Suggestions:** Equipment used in the photo session should be clean, in good shape, and as colorful and attractive as possible. This includes ropes, harnesses, helmets, etc. A few warm-up initiatives before the shoot can get the group motivated and more comfortable with each other. Visit the site the day before the shoot to do a general clean-up and ensure that it is in photographable condition.
- **Equipment Requests from photographer:** This may include ladders, a cherry picker and driver, and other various tools to get them eye-to-eye with the models.
- **HAVE FUN!**

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